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ABSTRACT

All styles of genre research share an attention to particular features of texts in use. The question is, however, how to teach genre. This paper first reviews what seem to be two opposed theories of teaching genre. After arguing that to differing extents both theories rely upon a transmission model of teaching, the paper then discusses attempts to teach genre as a tool for student-initiated research in a writing internship course. It states that the class sessions provided useful content and invention strategies for later reflection and critique because genre theory became a language tried on in class--in many ways like the discourse students were trying on at their internships. The paper suggests that in the future students might be asked if they feel any tension between the abstract principles of rhetoric they learn in class and the situated, practical knowledge they learn on site. Contains 15 references. (NKA)

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Genres Made Real: Genre Theory as Pedagogy, Method, and Content

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Looking back years from now, a historian may wonder at the current breadth of research in rhetoric and composition on genre. Since Carolyn Miller's (1984) redefinition of genres as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations," the past fifteen years have seen a wide variety of historical, ethnographic, theoretical, and applied linguistic research into written genres. Genre studies have explored numerous contexts—schools, workplaces, government and non-profit organizations, centers of scientific research. Numerous themes as well: genres mediating individual agency and creativity; the particular material histories of writing; genres as "stabilized-for-now," responding to changes in technology and convention (Schryer 1994); conflicting intentions embodied in genres; the roles and identities preserved through them; the activity systems they shape.

All of the above styles of genre research share an attention to particular features of texts in use. They examine the social effects of genres as they shape—and are shaped by—epistemological and institutional assumptions about language. But having conducted descriptive and theoretical research into genres in use—and shared this work with colleagues—how might we share what we've learned with students? In other words, how can we teach genre? In this paper, I will first review what seem to be two opposed theories of teaching genre. After arguing that to differing extents both theories rely upon

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a transmission model of teaching, I will then discuss our own attempts to teach genre as a tool for student-initiated research in a writing internship course.

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One pedagogy of genre explicitly teaches formal and grammatical features of written texts. The "Sydney school" of genre theory—so-called because of its origin in the University of Sydney Department of Linguistics (Freedman & Medway 1994)—has to date produced a spate of research on student acquisition and use of typical school genres. Drawing heavily on Halliday's systemic linguistics, this tradition offers empowerment strategies for often disadvantaged students through an explicit process of modeling, scaffolding (Cazden 1979; Bruner [1978] calls it "guided participation"), and independent creation of academic genres. J. R. Martin's view of genre as a "staged, goal-oriented process" (Martin, Christie, & Rothery 1987) is an exemplar, as it has been the basis for wide-ranging pedagogical initiatives in Australia. These initiatives are based on Martin's examination of six genres important to school literacy, and they link instruction in grammar and organization of texts directly to end products. Students learn the 'report' genre, for example, by reading examples of them, learning their parts and social purposes, and trying them on; students thereby acquire what Cope & Kalantzis call a "metalanguage" (p. 8) for generalizing about language use across genres.

However, the form this metalanguage takes in the genre-based classroom seems prescriptive. Some in the Sydney school advocate teaching scientific or business discourse to students through the proper use and placement of noun strings, transitions, and abstractions (Martin 1993); others classify as genres rhetorical stances very similar to Alexander Bain's modes of argument, EDNA (Callaghan, Knapp, & Noble 1994). These

attempts do not account for the presence of different modes and styles in similar genres, for the presence of many (perhaps conflicting?) modes in a single genre, or for the shifting nature of genres-in-use. Despite efforts to inculcate a critical reflectiveness about school genres in students, it would seem that foregrounding form reifies genres as stable, pre-modernist, or generally literary text-types. And as Kress notes approvingly, the teacher in the genre-based classroom should be acknowledged as "a figure who has valuable and therefore valued knowledge, a figure whose authority derives from that knowledge" (1993, p. 31). In such a classroom, then, the teacher's role is that of an expert who transmits his or her genre knowledge to students, in one direction. As he or she reproduces for students the features of generic texts, the teacher may indeed be discursively maintaining a sort of academic status-quo (as has also been pointed out by Luke [1994]). If students are not asked to find and create genres independently, perhaps outside school control, their participation in a process of guided instruction seems a moot point.

The Sydney school takes a socially-minded, liberationist stance that we will see is completely absent from North American discussions of genre. Their attention is to school as a site of social change, where underprivileged groups gain access to the dominant academic discourse, and therefore discursive power. Nevertheless, it is surprising that only a fraction of research in this tradition has been conducted in local organizations, workplaces, and ad hoc communities, and few projects have attempted to contextualize school curricula with this research (one exception are Joyce and Kalantzis's teacher training programs in workplace literacy [Cope, Kalantzis, Kress, and Martin 1993]). At all levels school is a complexly organized site where genres and discourses

structure social actions (Freedman 1993); however, "doing school" well does not necessarily prepare a student for the world beyond. As a group, the Australian model of genre instruction thus overlooks what I see as a key issue: to what extent does genre knowledge transfer, either across academic contexts or to contexts outside school?

Hill and Resnick (1995) take up this question directly, arguing that genre skills developed in academic contexts do not effectively transfer to other discursive situations. Even when instructors outline an imaginary rhetorical situation for their students to respond to—like those in the Sydney school—these situations do not match the complexity and dynamism of an authentic context. Authentic rhetorical situations are generally *far more complex* than can be created on an assignment sheet. Actors in real business or community organizations are aware of *local knowledge* and specific rhetorical constraints about the institution where they work. And this rhetorical information brought to bear on the writing task is *tacit*, embedded within real experiences, not listed explicitly on an assignment sheet. Rhetorical knowledge is procedural and social, and is not easily transferred in one direction, from college writing classes into an authentic writing environment. Hill and Resnick argue that it can be effectively learned "only within the community within which the writing task is situated" (150), no matter how genuine instructors try to make their assignments. Thus building rhetorical skills in school that will be useful to students later on, outside school, seems problematic at best. Genres must be "real," and perceived as such by the students themselves.

Hill and Resnick's work would seems to dovetail with the arguments by several genre theorists now working in North America. Stressing the fluidity of genres as they

respond to local purposes and audiences, scholars such as Dias, Freedman, Medway, and Paré (1999) outright reject the notion that genres can be taught. If genres are always already embedded in social contexts, and are dynamic, stabilized only "for-now," any pedagogy stripped of this context would necessarily be prescriptive and formalistic. Genres must be learned, they seem to argue, but can not be taught at all. Elsewhere, Freedman (1993) qualifies this argument, suggesting that teaching should always be done in the context of real social actions involving those genres. For this reason, she argues that "teaching in the workplace, or in a writing center, or during an internship provides an ideal locale for this immediate kind of intervention" (p. 205). Freedman states that the effectiveness of this kind of teaching relies equally on the student's learning style and the accuracy of the "teacher's explicit knowledge" when discussing the specific features of a generic text. Counter to Hill and Resnick, Freedman suggests that teachers "stage-manage" complex writing situations in order to expose students to genre features (p. 200). Again, to what extent might these skills transfer? And how can students more directly manage their appropriation of genres? These two questions, I would argue, are directly linked. As with the Australian model, Freedman's pedagogy of genre thus seems to allow only for a transmission model of teaching, in which student learning is predicated upon a teacher's genre knowledge.

How accurate can a teacher's knowledge of genres outside school *be*? There are numerous reports in literature on Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing in the Disciplines movements of "writing specialists," such as we are, who misunderstand or gloss over the complex rhetorics of workplaces and offer formulaic writing strategies as a result. As writing teachers, we certainly may not have near enough time to spend in

nonacademic contexts to ensure that we understand the genres and conventions of a workplace as an expert, or even an intern, would. And, as Anson and Forsberg (1990) point out, an intern's acquisition of workplace conventions, genres, and other rules may itself be fraught with difficulties. Because internships are temporary, student interns may not fully appreciate the complexity of a workplace's organization. Whereas experienced workers can carefully choose rhetorical tactics to employ in specific situations, interns in their study have no basis from which to accept or reject advice from supervisors. As a result, interns may "reach eagerly for anything that sounded like a rule or looked like a model" (217). Similarly, Hill and Resnick argue that student interns most often do not see the effects of their work, share in the benefits coming from it, or attain expert status while completing an internship. Thus, it seems, neither a formalized pedagogy nor a teacher's expert genre knowledge can offer a balanced and complex view of genres as the mediating and dynamic discursive force they seem to be. Further, as we have seen, student attempts to learn genres *in situ*, through internships, may easily go astray.

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Teaching genre theory as a means of student-directed research into writing offers another avenue for pedagogy in advanced composition and writing internship courses. In the course I observed—called "Internship in Writing," taught Spring 1999—genres were not taught as sets of static, formal features, nor were their acquisition by students left entirely to chance. Instead, we believe that to students a workplace genre gradually became a shifting and context-bound communiqué, a statement of organizational purpose that they both critiqued and created.

Relatively quickly that spring, students' thoughts turned to texts both inside and outside academic contexts—grants, handbooks, letters, résumés, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. As Dr. Matalene has discussed, students chose their own internships and, with initial guidance from her, made contacts, sent letters of introduction, and arranged for interviews with persons who in most cases became their supervisors. From day one, students directed their own learning. The syllabus required a student to situate his or her experiences within academic essays stressing critical reflection, to supplement on-site learning with rhetorical analysis. In a process to some extent counter to Moffet's *Universe of Discourse*, the process began—as it must—with writing from the outside of the organization and continued as each intern worked his or her way inside. At the same time, however, student writings ran a track parallel to the plan of Moffet's text—writing from and about themselves at the beginning of the semester, writing as a part of an agency's world of discourse by the end.

Genre theory was introduced close to halfway through the semester as an explicit tool for learning about this discourse. Because writing documents was students' main responsibility, the choice seemed natural. The reading list included Bakhtin's (1986) "The Problem of Speech Genres" and Charles Cooper's "Aspects of a Definition of Genre" (from *Evaluating Writing* [1997]). Because most of our students were English majors, talk each day flowed from their notion of literary text types to a more complex concept of genres as social structures, each having a recognizable form and purpose appropriate to a particular social situation. Class discussion moved quickly from these general parameters to students' own use of genres, both in school and now in their internships. We discussed texts themselves—visual and structural elements, common

registers, ethos and form, tropes and schemes; and also the social relations they organize—documenting needed information, categorizing, communicating strategies, showing and hiding power. But beyond general suggestions about writing letters and organizing résumés, *no attempt was made to tell students how to write the genres they were being exposed to*. Instead, students were encouraged to bring in examples of the genres they had found on-site, or documents they were now to write themselves. In a form akin to "mini-ethnography" units in composition and advanced composition courses, students informally presented rhetorical "case studies" about documents they were often struggling with. As the course progressed, these completely ad-hoc show-and-tell sessions about workplace documents became a larger and more important part of the course than I believe anyone expected.

During one class session, a student working at the South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs brought in two versions of a public service announcement she had composed for an upcoming conference, one "positive" and another "negative." In her attempts to construct PSAs that conveyed the theme of the conference that year, she consciously built into them several schemes and tropes. One, she said, moved from community to individual, and the other from individual to community. Through an extended discussion of anaphora, climax, and the topos of antecedent and consequence, among others, she laid bare these general rhetorical techniques for everyone in the class. At the same time, the themes that emerged through a critical reflection on the two PSAs—community, empowerment, and responsibility—gave students through this one genre a sense of the unique and complex rhetorical situations her supervisors wanted her to capture in a 30-second spot. In this, as in other examples, the student writer is the

expert who brings authentic workplace genres into the classroom. As an ethnographer might, she brought to the course discursive artifacts from the workplace and offered rhetorical interpretations of their significance. Saying that the generic language one adopts on-site "becomes a part of what's in your head," she found that the organization was "in the process of defining itself." In large part this was accomplished through its genres, which she found to be an expression of the multiple and often conflicting allegiances they had.

Another student, who worked at the South Carolina Arts Commission, discussed the many documents he had a hand in during one of my visits to his worksite. Days before, he related a story to us in which his supervisor had heavily edited a letter he had written, replacing his terse, academic, point-by-point style with casual language "to make it friendlier." When I visited him, he was busy writing short bio's of panelists participating in a conference, and putting together grant material and profile sheets in packets of agencies vying for state funds. Because of the "tremendous amount of power involved," he said, one supervisor was "shocked" by his request to produce materials for them, and early on part of his time there was spent stapling. But as he demonstrated facility with the genres they used, he was allowed to write press releases and thank-you letters and edit their monthly publication, "Untitled." He appropriated the mechanisms of writing within a large commission well enough to critique their genres rhetorically in course work, yet remained open to what he believed was still a foreign discourse. As a common refrain, he said he was "learning [the genres] as I go along," that he "only developed a grasp of them" by writing them, by "being a part of" the discourse of the

agency. The texts he brought to class were artifacts of a learning process taking place as much outside of class as in it.

Generally, students only offered samples of their writing after having placed their classmates within the larger context of their worksite's projects and needs. Having done so, talk moved to the authentic strategies organizations had used to situate their discourse within recognizable genres. The uniqueness, but the striking similarities, of genres. The sessions provided useful content and invention strategies for later reflection and critique because genre theory became a language we tried on in class—in many ways like the discourse students were trying on at their internships. Moreover, students' use of these texts as concrete examples of writing experience lent authenticity to discussions of rhetoric. They also lent credence to the claim that rhetoric offers generalizable tools for both producing and examining discourse.

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To close, I'm drawn to ask questions about our experiences with genre and rhetoric over that spring semester. Though motivated by course requirements, students became something along the lines of temporary experts who did not just acquire genre knowledge of a site's documents. They also appropriated the language of genre theory to talk about documents. This ad-hoc pedagogy re-writes students as legitimate apprentices in the specialized discourse of one domain, and teachers as purveyors of rhetorical strategies across domains. As teachers offer these strategies, their comments are buttressed by the authentic genre testimony of writing interns who have been there, seen it happen.

At the same time, it seems obvious that in the future we will need to ask more questions. I wonder about the learning going on at the different organizations, the extent to which workplace supervisors acted as genre experts or engaged in explicit teaching. Or, we might ask future students if they feel any tension between the abstract principles of rhetoric they learn in class and the situated, practical knowledge they learn on-site. The questions go on and on. We certainly might refine our efforts to make students aware of the situated, dynamic nature of genres at work—not just the texts but the social relations they embody. Or empirically study what effect the language of genre theory has on learning rhetoric. As one student said, "there are a million documents—the genres go on and on."

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